

This is a brief guide to the most basic requirements of operating a business in the City of Reading, and offers tips and resources to help entrepreneurs who are thinking about starting a new business.

Obtain a Zoning Permit

Zoning refers to permitted uses on parcels of land. There are various Zoning Districts designated throughout the City of Reading. Within each District, various types of commercial and business activities are permitted or prohibited. Click for a [zoning map](#) [1] and [list of permitted uses](#)[2].

It is against the law to operate a business without the required Zoning Permit. It is strongly advised that, before purchasing a property with the intention of establishing a specific type of business, or before establishing any business anywhere in the City, you check with the [Zoning Office](#) [3] .

The City allows certain [home-based business activities](#) [4], and can issue a so-called 'zero impact' zoning permit where the conduct of a business will not result in traffic, parking requirements, or in-person business transactions.

A [Zoning Permit Application](#) [5], for which there is a fee, can be obtained in the Zoning Office. You are also free to speak to the Zoning Administrator (an appointment can be arranged by calling 610-655-6326) if you have any questions about establishing a business at a particular location.

Zoning regulations also apply to signage used to identify or promote a business. Again, we encourage you to check with the Zoning Office before erecting any signs.

Obtain a Business Privilege License

An annual **Business Privilege License** can be obtained at the Citizen's Service Center, City Hall, 815 Washington St., Reading, PA 19601. Currently, the annual fee to operate any business in the City (including entities which are located outside the City limits - such as contractors, repair personnel, etc. who have customers in the City) is \$55. It is against the law to operate a business - to receive payment for any goods or service - without the required Business Privilege License. This includes the receipt of commissions or rental income from properties located in the City of Reading.

File an Annual Business Privilege Tax Return

Most businesses are assessed a small fee based on gross receipts generated on the sale of goods and services in the City. [Detailed information is available on the City's web-site.](#)[6]

Obtaining a Health Permit

The sale of food is also regulated by certain health and safety codes, and [permits](#) [7] that are issued by the Property Maintenance Division at City Hall. It is against the law to serve food or sell groceries without the required permits. For additional information, contact the PMD at 610-655-6283.

Vending and Amusement Permits

Virtually every device in which customers put money will require a permit or a license. [Food vending machine permits](#) [8] are issued by the Property Maintenance Division. [Licenses](#) [9] are issued by the Citizen's Service Center.

Operating Rental Housing

Renting a house to non-related parties requires both a [Rental Housing](#) [10] and a [Zoning Permit](#) [11] application, and is subject to substantial regulations, including an annual permit renewal process and periodic safety and codes compliance inspections. The process starts in the Zoning Office with a Zoning Application. The conversion of a single-family home into multi-family housing is not permitted anywhere in the City of Reading. Rental housing is subject to periodic inspection by the Property Maintenance Division and/or the Fire Marshal's Office, for which there are fees. Please be aware there are stiff fines for violating the City's ordinance governing rental housing. The operation of rental housing is considered a business; a Business Privilege License is required and annual business Privilege Tax returns must be filed

Alterations to Existing Buildings and New Construction

The City's [Building & Trades Division](#) [12] issues permits and reviews plans for building alterations and new construction. In some cases, the City Planner and the Fire Marshall will also be involved in reviewing plans, approving occupancies, etc. But every building alteration will require at least one Building Permit. Before making any alterations, check with Building & Trades by calling 610-655-6284.

'One-Stop' Meeting

Obtaining approvals for a new building, or alterations at an existing building, requires dealing with various agencies, and can be a complex and frustrating process. Because of the overlapping regulatory responsibilities and requirements, and to improve coordination among various agencies, the City offers a 'one-stop' meeting where representatives of Zoning, Planning, Building & Trades and Fire Marshal Office personnel come together to meet with a business owner who is planning major modifications or new construction (do not, however, be misled by the name of this meeting, because virtually no building project ever requires only 'one stop' at City Hall). Meetings are held Thursdays, and appointments can be made through the Building Trades Office by calling 610-655-6284.

Exterior Alterations in Historic Districts

The City has [five designated Historic Districts](#) [13]. In these Districts, in addition to requiring a building permit, any alteration to the outside of a building - including changing the color of paint or installing a door or window - must be approved by the Preservation Officer or the [Historic Architectural Review Board \(HARB\)](#) [14]. Upon approval, a [Certificate of Appropriateness](#) [15] is issued by the Preservation Officer. Be advised that this step may add 45 days or more to the approval process for obtaining a Building Permit. The Historic Preservation Officer is located in the Zoning Office. In most cases, the Building & Trades office will notify applicants if approval is required from Historic Preservation, but it is always best to check before making any exterior changes, to avoid having to make expensive modifications and pay fines for violating Historic District regulations.

Source URL (retrieved on Feb 18 2017 - 10:55pm): <https://www.readingpa.gov/content/step-step>

Links:

- [1] <https://www.readingpa.gov/content/zoning-map>
- [2] <https://www.readingpa.gov/content/zoning-ordinance>
- [3] <https://www.readingpa.gov/content/zoning>
- [4] <https://www.readingpa.gov/content/home-occupation-zoning-permit-application-letter>
- [5] https://www.readingpa.gov/zoning_applications
- [6] https://www.readingpa.gov/tax_information
- [7] <https://www.readingpa.gov/content/health-permit-application>
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- [10] <https://www.readingpa.gov/content/rental-housing-permit-application>

- [11] <https://www.readingpa.gov/zoning-permit-application>
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- [14] <https://www.readingpa.gov/content/historic-architectural-review-board>
- [15] <https://www.readingpa.gov/content/submitting-application>